

James 4

James 4:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Lesson Text: **James 4:1-12**
- B. James, a half brother of our Lord, is addressing Christians in general and Jewish Christians in particular.
- C. What a contrast between the last verse in chapter three and the first verse in chapter four.
1. The final verse in James 3 says: “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (**James 3:18**).
 2. The first verse in chapter 4 says: “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? James 4:1

Verses 1

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

- A. James answers a question with a question. The second questions answers the first question.
- B. James is setting before his people a basic question--whether their aim in life is to submit to the will of God or to gratify their own desires for the pleasures of this world?
1. He warns that, if pleasure is the policy of life, nothing but strife and hatred and division can possibly follow.
 2. He says that the result of the over-mastering search for pleasure is "polemoi," "wars" and "machai," "battles."
 3. He means that the feverish search for pleasure issues in long-drawn-out resentments which are like wars, and sudden explosions of enmity which are like battles.
 4. The root cause of this unceasing and bitter conflict is nothing other than desire.
 5. The New Testament is clear that this overmastering desire for the pleasures of this world is always a threatening danger to the spiritual life. It is the cares and riches and pleasures of this life which combine to choke the good seed (Luke.8:14).
- C. This pleasure-dominated life has certain inevitable consequences.
1. It sets men at each other's throats.
 - a. The basic desires are for the same things--for money, for power, for prestige, for worldly possessions, for the gratification of bodily lusts, lead people to enter the competitive arena.

- b. They trample each other down in the rush to grasp them. They will do anything to eliminate a rival.
2. The craving for pleasure drives men to shameful deeds.
 - a. As long as that desire is in one's heart it is apt to explode into ruinous action at any time. A frustrated desire is a bomb that must be defused. If not, when it explodes it will not obtain what it wanted and may destroy everything nearby.
 - b. The steps of the process are simple and terrible. A man allows himself to desire something. That thing begins to dominate his thoughts; he finds himself involuntarily thinking about it in his waking hours and dreaming of it when he sleeps. It begins to be what is aptly called a ruling passion. He begins to form imaginary schemes to obtain it; and these schemes may well involve ways of eliminating those who stand in his way. For long enough all this may go on in his mind. Then one day the imaginings may blaze into action; and he may find himself taking the terrible steps necessary to obtain his desire. Every crime in this world has come from desire which was first only a feeling in the heart but which, being nourished long enough, came in the end to action.
3. The craving for pleasure in the end shuts the door of prayer.
 - a. If a man's prayers are simply for the things which will gratify his desires, they are essentially selfish and, therefore, it is not possible for God to answer them.
 - b. The true end of prayer is to say to God, "Thy will be done."
 - c. The prayer of the man who is pleasure-dominated is: "My desires be satisfied."
 - d. It is one of the grim facts of life that a selfish man can hardly ever pray aright; no one can ever pray aright until he removes self from the centre of his life and puts God there.

Verse 2

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

- A. One of the most important things a Christian can learn to do in this life is to learn to pray! One day, the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him for some instruction.
 - They did not ask Him how to heal the sick.
 - They did not inquire about how to raise the dead.
 - They were not interested in Jesus' secret for walking on the water.
 - They were not interested in His recipe for multiplying the loaves and the fishes.
 - When they came to Jesus, they asked for a very simple, elementary thing. Look at **Luke 11:1**. They said, "**Lord, teach us to pray.**" These men

knew that prayer was central to everything else in their relationship with God. They wanted to have a prayer life like the one they saw in Jesus! . . . And so should we!

- B. James points to two problems:
1. A failure to pray **PERSONALLY**.
 2. A failure to pray **PROPERLY**.
- C. The word kill is to be taken in the sense of hatred proceeding from envy, as is condemned in **1 John 3:15** – "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."
1. You desire and do not have; so you kill.
 2. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war.
 3. The frustration and misery of the selfish, pleasure-craving soul are eloquently portrayed in this verse.
- D. Without submission to God, our desires lead us down a well-work path that will harm us and those around us.
1. Unchecked desires lead to not asking God.
 2. Not asking God leads coveting, evil desires, and wrong motives.
 3. Coveting, evil desires, and wrong motives lead to fights and quarrels.
 4. Fights and quarrels lead to church life marked by death (slander, judging other, name calling, boasting, backsliding, etc.)
- E. The receivers of James' epistle were lacking at several levels,
1. By ignoring God they demonstrated a lack of regard for His presence and power to help them.
 2. They lacked godly wisdom because they refused to ask God for it. James 1:5
 3. They lacked what they really needed because they did not rely on God, Instead, they relied on their desires to guide them.

Verse 3

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

- A. God answers prayer, but not all prayer, especially not in giving the ungodly the ingredients for selfish gratification.
- B. James mentions the most common problems in prayer:
1. Not asking.
 2. Asking for the wrong things.
 3. Asking for the wrong reasons.
- C. James confronted the tendency to pray carelessly. True prayer must express dependence upon God. Is not James implying that we should think before we pray?
1. Unexamined prayers degenerate into clichés and wish lists.
 2. Perhaps these four questions can help us with our prayers.
 - a. Do I really need what I am asking for?

- b. Am I asking for special treatment from God?
- c. Is it the best interest of God's kingdom and His will that I receive this request?
- d. What do I plan to do when God grants my request?
- e. Am I prepared to be as strong in my faith with an answer of "No" as I think I would be with an answer of "yes."
- d. Am I really willing to submit to God's Will in the outcome of my prayer?

Verse 4

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- A. The shocking words, "Adulterers and adulteresses), literally "adulteresses (the feminine form is used), graphically describes the spiritual unfaithfulness of the people and intends to jar them into facing their true spiritual condition.
 - 1. The concept of adultery against God is taken from the Old Testament when God's people, Israel, turned to idolatry when they tried to combine the worship of God and the worship of Baal.
 - 2. Like an adulterous wife, they wanted the husband and the home, but also wanted the lover. James is about to describe these Christians as adulterous because they are trying to love God and have an affair with the world at the same time.
 - 3. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God . . . To be an friend of God is to be an enemy of the world.
 - 4. The word for "world" here is "kosmos" which refers to the system of evil under Satan's control (literally, all that is opposed to God). **To be friendly with the world is to adopt its values and desires.**
- B. Why is it impossible to be a friend of the world and a friend of God at the same time? The answer is simple . . . **The paths lead in opposite directions and to different conclusions.**
 - 1. God's path:
 - a. Faith, Hope, Love (1 Corinthians 13:13)
 - b. Love, Joy, Peace, etc. (Galatians 5:22)
 - c. Abundant Living (John 10:10)
 - d. Eternal Life (John 3:16)
 - e. Helping Others (Galatians 6:10)
 - 2. The world's path
 - a. Strife and Quarrels (James 4:1-3)
 - b. Materialism (1 John 2:15-17)
 - c. Hopelessness (Ephesians 2:12)
 - d. Selfish Living (James 4:3)
 - e. Death (Proverbs 14:12)

C. According to John 17:14, we are in the world but we are not of the world.

1. **1 John 4:4** – “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”
 - a. We have a choice of serving the greater or the lesser.
 - b. We have a choice of serving the One Who is God, or the one who tried to be God and failed.
 - c. Choosing for one automatically means choosing against the other.
 1. There is no middle ground.
 2. There is no straddling the fence.
 3. There is no acceptable lukewarmness.
2. The ways of this world will not take us to God’s place in the next world.

Verse 5

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

- A. Of course the Scriptures are not in vain.
- B. Whatever we say and how we live must be rooted in Scripture.

Verse 6

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

- A. Grace is God’s unmerited favor. By having this unmerited favor, a Christian enjoys the benefits of:
 1. Being a child of God . . . Dwelling among the family of God here and in the hereafter.
 2. The privilege of access to God in prayer and His divine guidance and protection.
 3. The powers of Heaven are on their side because they are on Heaven’s side.
 4. Daily cleansing (forgiveness) . . . Spiritual blessings . . . the promise of Heaven.
- B. God resists the proud.
 1. Pride makes us self-centered and leads us to conclude that we deserve all we can see, touch, or imagine
 2. Pride creates greedy appetites for far more than we need.
- C. What feeds our envy?
 1. Focusing on what others have.
 2. Noticing what we don’t have.
 3. Allowing advertising to dictate our “wants” list.
 4. Forgetting the basis for real contentment . . . Peace with God and love of family and friends.

Verse 7**Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**

- A. Satan knows that as long as he can stimulate human pride, he can delay God's plan, even if only temporarily. His efforts to seduce us to become worldly must be resisted.
- B. The devil can be resisted, and our resistance will cause him to flee. Conversely, a lack of resistance will practically guarantee ongoing harassment by Satan.
- C. The Bible tells us about our destructive enemy.
 - 1. The devil's primary purpose now is to separate man from God. Destined for destruction, he wants to take as much of creation with him as he possibly can.
 - a. Among the reasons we so desperately need God's grace is that we are locked in mortal combat with a superior enemy.
 - b. **1 Corinthians 10:13** – "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."
 - 2. The Bible assures us that the devices of the devil can be known.
 - 2 Corinthians 2:11** - "Lest Satan should take advantage of us; **for we are not ignorant of his devices.**"
 - 3. The devil's tools are seductions of many kinds. He tried three of them on Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11.
 - a. The seduction of **self-sufficiency** . . . Challenging Jesus to meet His own needs.
 - b. The seduction of **self-importance** . . . Challenging Jesus to test God.
 - c. The seduction of **power** . . . Challenging Jesus to exchange power over the world for submission to the devil.

Verse 8**Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

- A. This appeal is made to sinners. The word used for sinner is "hamartolos" which means the hardened sinner, the man whose sin is obvious and notorious."
 - 1. In the Old Testament God required the priest to wash themselves before entering the Tabernacle or Temple to render service.
 - 2. James's readers were aware that God requires more than just an outward washing.
- B. Biblical thought demands a fourfold cleansing.
 - 1. It demands a cleansing of the **lips**. (Isaiah 6:5-6).

2. It demands a cleansing of the **hands**. (Psalm 24:4; James 4:8).
3. It demands a cleansing of the **heart**. (Psalm 73:13).
4. It demands a cleansing of the **mind**. (James 4:8).

That is to say, the ethical demand of the Bible is that a man's words and deeds and emotions and thoughts should all be purified. Inwardly and outwardly a man must be clean, for only the pure in heart shall see God (**Matthew 5:8**).

Verse 9

Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

- A. In the previous eight verses, James has described a long spiritual process.
 1. He began by describing people in conflict with each other and with themselves.
 2. Then he described the source of those conflicts as inappropriate desires motivated in large part by trying to stay close to the world and to God.
- B. These three different terms, “lament,” “mourn,” and “weep,” capture the struggle of a soul drawing near to God.
 1. There is a dying which takes place. **Romans 6:11** – “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
 2. Today, few gospel preachers tell their listeners that they must forsake their selfish ways and surrender their lives to Jesus. Instead they hear about turning to Christ as if it somehow did not involve the rather painful turning away from something or someone else.
- C. This is a call to deep and heartfelt repentance. The people’s laughter (scornful laughter that refuses to take sin seriously) and their enjoyment of the world’s pleasures need to be completely changed-to mourning and gloom over their sins. Until this happens, there is no room for the laughter of real freedom and the joy of the Lord.

Verse 10

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

- A. Humbling ourselves means that recognizing that our worth comes from God alone.
 1. It is recognizing our desperate need for His help and submitting to His will for our lives.
 2. Although we do not deserve God’s favor, He reaches out to us in love and gives us worth and dignity, despite our human shortcomings.
- B. One of the most touching Biblical illustrations of this truth is found in the forgiving father in Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son. (Luke 15:11-32)
 1. The youngest son took his inheritance and set out to be the world’s best friend.

2. It was not until he found himself bankrupt in every way that he repented.
3. He returned home grieving.
4. The son confessed to his father that he was unworthy to be called a son.
5. The father lifted him up and welcomed him back into the family.
6. The act of returning home required submission.
7. The wayward son's words of repentance required humility.

Verse 11

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

- A. With an abrupt shift from describing an appropriate attitude towards God, James turns to the proper relations between brothers.
- B. The Greek word translated “speak evil” (katalaleite) refers to any form of speaking evil against a person.
 1. Slander
 2. Gossip
 - a. Throughout the ages, people have been slow to realize that there are few sins which the Bible so unsparingly condemns, as the sin of irresponsible and malicious gossip.
 - b. Sins of the tongue! How terrible are sins of the tongue! Sins of the tongue can kill a person as surely as the sword. Dr. David Livingston discovered this. His wife died a premature death, thanks to the backbiting tongues of some people in the white settlements of South Africa.
 3. Lying to or about.
 4. Etc.

Verse 12

There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

- A. God gave the Law through Moses (type) . . . And God gave the “royal law” (the gospel) through Christ, the antitype of Moses
- B. The Old Law and the Royal Law of the New Testament both condemn sins of the tongue.

CONCLUSION:

- A. James 4:1-12 entails some steps to a victorious prayer life.
 1. Avoid forsaken praying.
 2. Avoid foolish praying.
 3. Adopt faithful praying.
 - a. Be Sensitive

- b. Be Submissive
- c. Be Steadfast
- d. Be Separated
- e. Be Sincere

B. God gives more grace to the humble . . . Be humble!

Prayers can be prayer properly . . . Pray them.

The devil can be resisted . . . Resist him!

God allows you to draw near . . . Do it!

God will lift you up! . . . Let Him!

C. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**